

NSC BRIEFING

17 May 1955

FRENCH COMMUNIST MANEUVERS

- I. Recent Soviet attempts at detente with the West have been accompanied by a shift in French Communist Party tactics.
 - A. After 18 months of seeking support from any and all French elements opposing German rearmament, Communists have now switched to renewal of campaign for "unity of action" on social, economic issues with French Socialists.
 - B. However, move seems aimed largely at regaining popular support lost in past months through concentration on Germany, which evidently a matter primarily of Soviet foreign policy interest.
 - C. New program's emphasis on trade union demands is apparently in part a result of Communist labor leaders' dissatisfaction over former Party policy.
- II. New tactics may also be designed to counter Mendes France's current attempts to establish basis for left-of-center coalition majority in next National Assembly.
 - A. French Communists may have revived hopes that they can split rank-and-file Socialists from their leadership, establish Menni-type party.
 - B. Decrease in international tension may improve atmosphere for such cooperation, since some Socialists may be among those lulled by Soviet overtures.

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III. Since initiation of new line, Communists have had some success in gaining mutual support from Socialists on local level (in late April cantonal elections).

A. 11 May report by top Communist leaders, calling for united action with Socialists is latest in series of persistent appeals. Earlier ones:

1. 14 April - appeal for joint action in banning atomic weapons.
2. 18 April - call for mutual support in cantonal elections.
3. 9 May - appeal for joint opposition to laws granting government aid to church schools.

B. Despite vigorous rebuffs by top Socialist leaders, appears doubtful that Socialists on a local level can indefinitely resist such Communist appeals.

IV. Nevertheless, we expect Communist success to be limited.

Factors:

- A. Socialist Party leadership's adamant opposition to cooperation with Communists.
- B. Improved French economic conditions, which have lessened pressure on organized labor.
- C. Disagreements among top French Communist leaders, as Party boss Thorel remains on "sick list."